

Telephone interview with Dr. Dennis Shepard, former hospital corpsman who served in Indochina and participated in “Operation Passage to Freedom--1954. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 29 August 2003.

I thought we'd talk today about your time as a hospital corpsman back in the old days.

Okay.

When did you join the Navy?

March, 1951.

Where are you from?

Salem, OR.

And why did you decide to join the Navy?

I wanted to be a doctor and I did a semester of college but didn't do very well. I felt I was a little too young. I didn't have any money and by joining the Navy I'd get the GI Bill. So I joined and took my training as a hospital corpsman.

Where did you do that?

At Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. It was a 5-month program.

Where did they send you for your first assignment?

The Korean War was going on so they send me to the Marine Corps base at Camp Pendleton. I trained there as an operating room technician. That's where I first met Dr. Dooley. He was doing his internship there.

What were your impressions of Dooley the first time you met him?

He was a very outgoing, extraverted kind of person. He always had a big smile--big teeth. He liked everybody and he wanted everybody to like him. He was a bit flashy. He was driving a beautiful blue and white '51 Chevy Bel Aire convertible. It was just a breathtaking car. And he used to let people borrow it. And, of course, the weather in Camp Pendleton is convertible weather at least 300 days a year.

After my training there, I was assigned to the Marine Corps.

Did you go to the Field Medical Service School?

No, I did not. Because I was trained as an operating room technician, I worked in an operating room in the field, like a MASH unit. I didn't have to go out on patrol. However, I did go to the rifle and weapons courses and was rated as an expert marksman. When I was overseas, I had a weapon at all times.

Did you stay at Pendleton or did you move on?

After Pendleton, I was sent to Korea and spent 3 weeks there. And then there was the punch card system... Now we have computers but back then they had the IBM punch card system. And it showed that I had language abilities and that I had previously studied languages and had been to college. So they sent me to Japan and put me in a venereal disease control unit.

I learned Japanese. I had already studied Latin and Spanish. And I had spoken Norwegian as a child, but I didn't remember or speak any. Anyway, I had some foreign language and college background so they pulled me out of the foxhole in Korea and sent me to Japan.

I worked on an Army base at Gifu on the Nagara River. Subsequently, they converted the base from Army to Marine Corps. At the time I went there it was an Army base and every soldier on the base except for some of the officers was black. They were not integrated. So I was at an all black base. The reason they let us come was because it was being turned over to the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps was integrated. The funny thing was that you would go out in the community and all these little kids had curly hair.

Little Japanese kids?

Right. Well, they were half Japanese. They were frowned upon by the Japanese. The Japanese even frowned upon Japanese kids who were half white.

I think they say that the Japanese are probably the most racist culture in the world.

Xenophobic is correct. You're absolutely right. The children were absolute outcasts and the women were somewhat outcasts. But anyway, I learned Japanese and I worked the venereal disease units there. I also worked a MASH unit.

An actual Army unit?

No. It was a Marine Corps unit that had been an Army unit. The guy in charge was a dentist. He was in charge of who did the hernia surgery, who did the circumcisions. A lot of the military surgery was on these young servicemen who had problems that weren't taken care of when they were younger. And circumcision and hernia repair were common operations on these guys.

And so you assisted on a lot of those operations?

Yes. I'd sterilize the instruments, set them up, and then be in a sterile gown, sterile gloves, a cover on the head, booties, and then I would pass the instruments, sponges, and stuff to the doctor. Then he would do the surgery and a lot of times I would also be his first assistant. I'd hold the retractors. In fact, I'd hold retractors in one hand and pass instruments with the other. I also did that for 3 years after I got out of the service to make money while I was going to premed training at Oregon State College in Corvallis. And then I used it all the time I was in medical school, internship, and residency. When I got in private practice I knew more about an operating room than most doctors did. It was a tremendous benefit to me. And I built my own operating room. In fact, I still work in it. It's an ambulatory surgery center, Medicare certified. It carried through for the rest of my life. One thing I do say about the Navy. I think they really have the best schools as far as helping a young man or woman prepare for future civilian life. The Air Force has good schools. I don't think Army schools are as good. A Navy trained corpsman has better training than an Air Force or an Army corpsman. Of course we always said that the Navy had the best food.

While I was in Japan, the Marines decided to have maneuvers down on Iwo Jima. So I went there for 4 months on maneuvers which was quite fascinating.

I'll bet you saw quite a few remnants from the battle.

We saw all these caves where the Japanese hid and had to be flushed out with flame throwers. We even found a Cessna airplane. The wing had been lifted off and the whole thing had been slid in a cave. We found a hospital cave. Really fascinating. It was about 10 feet wide and about 35 feet long. It had an autoclave down there. The boiler was fired with gasoline or turpentine, or something. We also found surgical instruments.

From there I came back to my venereal disease control unit in Japan except it had been turned over to another group and so I stayed with the MASH hospital all the time. There we were doing emergency medicine. We had sick call. Everybody would line up in the morning to see a doctor and we'd go through these 50 or 60 people. To be away from their duty post, they had this slip in their hand with the guy's name and duty post and why he was absent and what his medical complaint was. We'd process these people. In civilian life it's called "Safeway medicine." You put the patient in the shopping cart and wheel him past the cash register. Except with us there was no cash register. We just wheeled them past the doctor.

In the afternoons, doctors would do things they wanted to learn for later in private practice. We had one doctor who was big on dermatology. He wanted to learn what is called a face peel. They used chemicals to peel off the superficial layers of the skin to get it down to where it's pretty red. It looks like a bad sunburn. You're peeling off this epidermal layer and leaving a dermal layer underneath to regenerate and you get a much smoother skin. At the time, it was the only cosmetic treatment available for acne scars. We used a technique this doctor had read about in a medical journal. He'd take dry ice and cheese cloth and dip it alcohol and then rub the skin. The alcohol, of course, kills bugs but it intensifies the effects of the dry ice. And the dry ice is just burning this off. When we got done we had taken off a real layer of skin, not just the flaky stuff on the surface. We were able to take away a lot of this acne scarring or pigmentation type scarring. We had these Marines lined up for the treatment and the doctor learned how to do it and went back into private practice subsequently.

He was a dermatologist?

Yes. And if he wasn't a dermatologist, he was ready to go into a dermatologic program or fellowship. We also had a dentist. When the general medical officer was performing a circumcision on a Marine, the dentist said, "Let me do this one." And he did. The dentist had been using the operating room for extracting third molars. We did a lot of wisdom tooth extractions there.

You must have done a little bit of everything.

We did a lot of cysts. Later, when I was on independent duty in Vietnam, I was able to do a lot of minor surgery in the field and some aboard a destroyer escort. I was more highly trained than their pharmacist's mate. He had been trained to hand out drugs. And I was trained in surgery. So they lined up all the potential surgery cases and I triaged them and figured out the ones I could do and the ones I shouldn't do. For 2 weeks there I was doing surgery aboard this ship.

How long were you in Japan?

I was overseas about 13 months of which 4 were in Iwo Jima and 4 months were in northern Vietnam--Haiphong. It's the port city for Hanoi.

How did you get involved in what at that time was called Indochina?

Indochina was made up of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The area was colonized by the French.

And they hadn't done a very good job as stewards, as I recall.

The French are real assholes. It showed. The British were much better at colonizing, much, much better. But the French have very specific rules of colonization. One of them is that you only speak French. And the other rule is that if you want to go to a university you must go to a university in France. So they didn't permit Vietnamese to be spoken above the 8th grade. If you were above the 8th grade in any kind of educational system you spoke French. And if you worked for civil service--and everything French ran on a bureaucracy--all the good jobs are bureaucratic. You couldn't work in one of these bureaucratic jobs unless you spoke very fluent French. The French were also very so so on building bridges, electrical systems, dams--the infrastructure of a society: Trains, highways, power grids, etc.

How did you get that assignment in Indochina?

Again it was the IBM punch card. It popped out that I had a language background.

But not necessarily in Vietnamese or French.

No. But I spoke Japanese, English, Spanish, and studied Latin. And I was able to learn languages quickly. I learned Japanese in 5 months. I learned Lao in 5 months. I also had a medical-surgical background; I was a technician who was also an expert marksman.

What do you recall about going there?

We were assigned to what they called Beach masters. That was a Marine Corps unit that goes in first before anybody else does and secures the "beach." Everything in the Marine Corps is based on amphibious warfare. The beach we secured was the Majestic Hotel in Haiphong. We were brought in by ship to Haiphong and off loaded from the ship with our personal equipment.

What was your mission?

Our mission was to process 600,000 refugees. That's all we knew. We didn't really know what the word process meant. But then they started off loading three or four jeeps with funny looking trailers. The funny looking trailer was a diesel tank with a fog generator. Think of a trailer about 5 feet wide and about 6 feet long with a big diesel tank on the front of it. On the back end it had a generator that would create a fog. There was a nozzle. What you did was get in the jeep and drive to a location, then start up the fog generator on the back. Then you'd turn on the spigot which allowed the diesel fuel to enter the generator. The fuel would be turned into a fine droplet. Added to this diesel was DDT. We'd drive along the road with this thing spraying off the right side of the vehicle in the swampy areas beside the roads. They had these irrigation ditches alongside the roads. And mosquito larvae would hatch in these ditches. We applied a layer of oil containing DDT in these ditches and eradicated the mosquitoes in a 10-mile radius around the city. People there were dying from malaria spread by these mosquitoes. We all got malaria.

You got it too?

Yes. I had malaria, hepatitis, and mononucleosis. Half the time we were white and half the time we were yellow depending upon what our livers were doing. Between the hepatitis and malaria our livers were just swelling up and going down, swelling up and going down.

When did you get to Haiphong?

I think it was August of '54.

When you got ashore and went to the Majestic Hotel, what were your impressions both of the city and Vietnam?

First of all, it was really humid and I'd never been in a humid area before. The guys from Florida and New Orleans knew what humidity was; I didn't. And then, of course, we had some real rain that would last 2 or 3 days, then everything would be fine for a week. I was used to rain, being from Oregon, and that's the reason I don't live in Oregon anymore. But it wasn't like Vietnam. The stuff came down in buckets.

Of course, there was a tremendous French influence. You'd swear you were in an old slightly decrepit part of Paris. It was really beautiful. The hotel was a gorgeous, old structure with mosquito nets over each bed. There were fans in the ceiling and little geckoes running around the walls eating the bugs. It was a very "romantic" place in appearance. The food was pretty good, if you like Vietnamese food. They put *nuoc mam* on everything. It's a fermented fish sauce. You could smell it a block away.

The Vietnamese people are small but tough. They could carry a heavier load farther than we could. They used what the Marines called an "idiot stick." It's really called a balance pole. It was about 6 feet long with a notch at each end. It's somewhat flexible like a ski. They hung a bag of rice at each end and balanced the stick on one shoulder. So one bag of rice might hang 3 feet in front of you and the other bag of rice about 3 feet behind you. They could carry huge loads for long distances using this balance pole. You talk about inventions that changed the world. That's got to be one of them. The problem carrying some things is that they are bulky and you can't get leverage on them. This device got the load away from your body so you could walk and carry at the same time.

So when we were loading these Vietnamese aboard our ship to take them down south, they were allowed to bring personal items. Well, the most valued personal item was a sewing machine. So here you have a guy who weighed maybe 120 pounds and he's carrying a 50-pound bag of rice on the front end and a 50-pound sewing machine on the back end. He weighs 120 and he could carry this 100-pound load all day! He could carry it 15 or 20 miles. I had never seen anything like it in my life. These are strong, tough, wiry people with tremendous endurance.

I guess that might explain what happened on the Ho Chi Minh Trail years later.

That's exactly right. Those people were totally underestimated. When we were there, there was no Vietcong as such. Ho Chi Minh was not obvious to us at that time. When we were there, there was what was called Cao Dai which was a religious sect. They were dedicated to driving out The French. We had to help evacuate some senior French navy brass. One method of torture was to pound chop sticks into their ears. The person would then get infected and get meningitis.

Did you ever see any of these people who had been tortured?

No, I didn't but Dooley was working in a different area than I was. When I went there, my commanding officer was CDR [Julius] Amberson. He had been a mining engineer--a sweetheart of a guy.

I was going to ask you about him.

Well, he was getting ready to be relieved, be shipped back to the states, and be let out of the military. He was a short-timer and was my commander for about 6 weeks. Then we got a new commanding officer, and that was Tom Dooley. He was right out of internship at Camp Pendleton. When I was going through my operating technician school, Dooley was doing his internship. He said that he wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon but at that time the Navy wasn't sending these guys to training but sending them overseas as general medical officers, which is what he was at the time.

How many corpsmen did he have working for him at that time?

There was a guy named Maugher and me. He was from the State of Washington. I'm pretty hazy as to who else was there. A lot of these guys were not corpsmen. They were aviation boatswain's mates, mechanics, truck drivers . . . We had all kinds of stuff. There were very few corpsmen. Maugher and I were the only two I can think of at that time.

What kind of facility did you have to work in with Dooley and the others?

We worked out of the Majestic Hotel. Then we had a little bivouac area where they kept the supplies such as the jeeps and diesel generators. Then we'd be transported down to the docks where the LCVs [landing craft vehicle and personnel] would be bringing in people from outlying areas along the river. They would stage these people there and then we would take them and run them past a little machine with a canister about the size of a half-gallon milk carton. It was filled with DDT powder. It looked like you were going to spray paint something. People would walk past us with their balance pole and they would be carrying food and all their personal belongings like typewriters, sewing machines, and we would spray these people in the crotch. Most of them wore shorts. The women wore bouffant pantaloons. You could grab the top of the pants and spray downward into the crotch or you could grab the bottom of the pant and spray upward into the crotch. It was for lice.

And this procedure was done just prior to them being loaded aboard?

Yes. And the other thing we were doing while we were spraying them was looking at each person to see if they had any overt evidence of communicable disease. Did they have a rash or an eruption of the skin? Did they have pus coming their eyes. We were looking for trachoma. Then the doctor would roll up the eyelid and look for the scarring and so forth. A lot of the trachoma was in 5- and 6-year-old kids. They came through there with flies on their eyes and pus coming down. They were in the acute phase.

What could you do for them?

The adults with trachoma were treated with tetracycline drops; the kids got an ointment. Sometimes they would pull someone aside and tell them they couldn't go because they had a communicable disease of some kind. I didn't know what some of these diseases were, but the doctors were always on the lookout for something that might be communicated to the rest of the people.

Were these mostly families?

Yes, most of the time. But you also had men and women who didn't have children. And if there were men and women couples, you didn't know if they were married or not.

Many of these people were devout Catholics and very anti-communist and wanted to go south. In our archives here we have a photo of a young Vietnamese who is being carried in a litter and he has a crucifix clutched to his chest. He looks like he's very ill.

I don't know of any sick person who was allowed to go south.

Was Dr. Amberson with you at this time or had he been relieved already?

He had already been relieved.

Near Haiphong, there was a very large refugee camp.

I wasn't involved with them.

So, you were right there along the shore where the LCVPs were coming in to pick up the refugees.

Actually, they were brought in by French boats. They almost looked like tugs. Then they went out by LCVPs to the USS *Montague*. I believe that was the main ship for transporting these people.

I should mention that one of the diseases we saw was leprosy. We were all afraid of catching it. It turns out that it's pretty hard to catch. At the time, we isolated them.

I imagine the people who showed signs of leprosy were pulled aside and not allowed to go south.

Yes. One of the problems we had was that people with psoriasis looked like they had leprosy. When you're in the tropics, it makes any disease look 10 times worse. The heat and the humidity . . . You could have some kind of minor little skin problem here and you get into the tropics and pretty soon it looks like some horrible contagious disease. These guys were learning about diseases every day as to what was a serious versus what was just a common, ordinary problem but looked a lot worse.

Were you aware at that time of the political situation. You had heard about Dienbienphu and that the Geneva Accords had been signed. Did you know about all this at the time?

We knew about the partition at the 17th Parallel and we knew that the people in the north would become communist, and that the people in the south would stay "free." We knew our job was to help as many people to go south as we could and provide the medical support necessary to make their passage relatively safe.

I should also mention that even though we were corpsmen we were working as warehouse men or longshoremen. Some days all we did was load or unload cases of DDT. On other days it was other types of medical equipment for processing these people.

The one thing that Dooley wrote about . . . He'd try to find something unique. The An Lac orphanage, Madame [Vu Thi] Ngai was in charge of the An Lac orphanage. She had been the mistress of one of the French admirals. She had this very Catholic orphanage. Dooley made

arrangements to transport the entire orphanage from Haiphong to Saigon all together. It was really big and made all the newspapers, the radios. He used a significant portion of that in his book. Later Madame Ngai came to the U.S. and lived in Georgia. She was even featured in an article in *People* magazine maybe 8 or 9 years ago. If you have access to *People* magazine it shows a picture of her and her American venue but it also describes how she had formed this An Lac orphanage and had these 60 or so Vietnamese orphans and how Dr. Dooley had rescued them and so forth.

So you worked pretty closely with Dooley at this time.

No. I didn't work closely with him there. I worked closely with him in Laos later on. At this time I only saw Dooley once every 3 or 4 days. He kind of got on our case a little bit. When we were able to go aboard the destroyer escort, we would buy cigarettes. They were a dollar a carton. Lucky Strike, a dollar a carton and then we'd take them ashore and sell them for 3 dollars a carton.

A little black market there.

Right. And then we'd turn around and buy a wristwatch for 4 dollars. Three or four of us had a thriving black market going in cigarettes. One of the guys had something going with whiskey. I had nothing to do with that; I was the cigarette specialist.

You mentioned earlier the French military--the French navy. Were they at all involved in any of this or had the Americans pretty much taken over this whole relief operation?

We worked with the French Foreign Legion. They were still there. The senior officers were all French and a few of the junior officers were German and very spit and polish. The enlisted troops were mostly Algerian, a lot of whom were black. In fact, I worked with a French corpsman and pulled call with him one night. His job was to stand watch in the whorehouse that belonged to the French Foreign Legion.

You say the Foreign Legion had their own whorehouse?

Yes. And his job was . . . As each guy came in he would do a pecker check on him and give him a condom. He was the corpsman in charge and he could keep a guy out if he wanted. "You've got the drip. You don't go in there." The French Foreign Legion guy would come in there and he would have to pull down his pants he'd have to milk down his dong to see if there was any discharge. If there wasn't any discharge, he'd hand him a condom and say okay.

These guys all had a chit book issued to them. The chit was for one haircut every 2 weeks and it was for so much rum per day or per week; it was either rum or brandy, and wine. It was maybe a half bottle per day. And then they had chits for the girls. I think there were something like three chits a week for the girls in the whorehouse. This book was issued to them; it was official.

Sounds very French, doesn't it?

Yes, it does.

As far as Dooley was concerned, you only saw him every other day.

I had no impressions then because he was pretty low key. He was under the gun. The Navy was starting to get curious about him. He was getting a higher profile. Being in Vietnam, he was writing letters and collecting data for background material for a book called *Deliver Us From Evil*. The Navy had some kind of a sting operation to prove he was gay. I heard about that second hand.

Since that time, it's all pretty much been documented. I didn't think you had anything new to offer on the subject. I just wanted your impressions about him as a physician.

He never approached me. For whatever reason, I didn't turn him on. I was talking to Pete Kersey after you called him and Pete says, "Did you read that book, *Dr. America*?" I said no, I didn't know anything about it. He said that I should read it.

Well, you're in it!

Right. Anyway, I ordered it on Amazon and it came here the day before yesterday. I'm going to read the book and see what it says.

I'll tell you a funny thing happened. I'd been in practice here in Santa Maria. I finished my residency at UCLA in 1967 and came here. I guess I'd been here for maybe 4 or 5 years and I got a call from the Vatican. I'm not Catholic; I'm Presbyterian. But anyway, I got a call from the Vatican and they said they wanted to send an investigator to visit with me. I asked what it was about and they said they had questions about Dr. Dooley. This very nice gentleman came--Italian--can't remember his name, and he gave me his business card and it was senior investigator for such and such. Anyway, he was here for 2 days and we talked for a couple of hours on one day and a couple of hours the next day. What it was, there was a priest at Notre Dame University that had proposed Dooley for sainthood. So this guy's job was to thoroughly investigate Dooley's background to see if he'd be a suitable candidate for canonization. Anyway, we talked and got into the thing about Dooley being gay and so forth, and I went all through that and answered his questions, explaining what I thought the significance of it was as far as Dooley related to other people he worked with. And he also asked a lot of questions about the good things that Dooley did that would reflect appropriately on the Catholic Church. And what his relationship was with his bishops and monseigneurs, nuns, and clergy, and what his attitudes were. Some questions reflected on his humanity; what did he do for the common man. What were his good deeds? I went through all of that. And then I think I blew it.

As the guy was leaving on the second day, I said, "You know. I think Dooley would make a wonderful saint because the Catholic Church doesn't have a saint for gay people."

Well, it never happened.

But I have to tell you. If Dooley hadn't been gay, he'd be a saint right now.

Well, in the self promotion department, he certainly did a pretty good job. He wrote all the books. I recall when I was a kid, he was in *Reader's Digest*, on all the talk shows; he was all over the place. And he certainly had the looks and the presence--the charisma. He seemed to have it all.

He was a wonderful, wonderful public speaker. I had him come to my medical school and we gathered all 400 plus medical students in the auditorium plus faculty and he spoke. He could just make them laugh until they were rolling in the aisles and then he'd have them crying

and the tears were rolling in the aisles. This guy was an unbelievable public speaker. I'd just never seen anyone who could turn people one way and then the other. He would raise money for MEDICO or whatever the organization was called at the time. The students in my class who didn't have two cents to rub together collected money and gave it to Dooley. This was the power of his public speaking. I started medical school in the fall of '59 and I thought it was December of that year that he spoke.

You left Haiphong in '54 and went back to the States.

Yes.

What happened then? Did you get out of the Navy?

I went from Haiphong to Japan for probably 3 months and then I was transferred to Bremerton, WA, which is an area where they discharge people. My job there as a corpsman was doing separation histories and physicals. This was like a separation center where people would be discharged from the military. All these guys were coming through there--ex Korean War types and my job was to process them. Your last history and physical in the military is to determine whether you have any service-connected injuries or problems for disability purposes and for Veterans Administration purposes. They do a careful vision test, a careful hearing test to see if you've lost vision or hearing. They do a careful orthopedic test to make sure you have full mobility of all joints. They check you for diabetes. If you didn't have it before you went into the service, but got it during service, it's a service-connected disease, believe it or not. Our job was to look for all kinds of service-connected problems. That was my final job in the Navy.

So what year did you get out?

That would have been '55. I did my last 4 months at Bremerton and then I got out and started college--a pre-med program at Oregon State.

Where did you go to medical school?

George Washington University in Washington, DC.

When did you graduate?

In June of '63. And then I went to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Los Angeles next to UCLA. I did my 1 year of internship there. Then I went across the street to UCLA and did 3 years of eye residency--ophthalmology. They have five hospitals but I was most of the time at Harbor General Hospital down in Torrance. It's a 1,200-bed hospital. As a matter of fact, if you've ever watched a TV program. It was one of the earliest emergency type medical programs. They always talk about Rampart General Hospital. That's Harbor General Hospital where it was filmed.

You said that at one point you went back to Southeast Asia to work with Dr. Dooley again.

When I was halfway through my pre-med program at Oregon State, Dooley called me. When we were in Vietnam. . . You reminded me of something I had totally forgotten. When we were in Vietnam Dooley sat down with me one time and said, "Let me run some stuff by you and just off the top of your head tell me what you think." And he said, "I'll be getting out of the service for various reasons. I'd really like to be an orthopedic surgeon but it just isn't in the

cards right now. There are too many people that need too much help. My thought is to come back to some area and bring medical care to people who need it worse than is needed in the United States today. I'm looking at some different areas. I'm looking at an area in Afghanistan--the Kyber Pass. There are a lot of people up there who are suffering terribly. I'm looking here in Indochina. South Vietnam is one possibility and Laos and Cambodia are another. And there are other possibilities. If things go ahead, I'll let you know." And that was it.

Anyway, I was halfway through my pre-med program and Dooley calls and says, "I've decided to go to Laos because Laos is the place that will treat us best and that needs our help the most. And we can make the biggest impact there. I've been given a \$25,000 dollar grant by the Reader's Digest as a prepayment for a condensation article about what we're going to be doing."

I don't know if you remember but the *Reader's Digest* used to have in each issue a condensed book. Dooley got a \$25,000 advance on a book he would eventually write about our work in Laos. And that was *The Night They Burned the Mountain*. And the reason was that his book *Deliver Us From Evil* was so popular as a condensation article in *Reader's Digest* that they went bananas over Dooley and they wanted him to turn out some more of that. He used the money as salary for me, Baker, and Kessey. Kessey had been a pharmacist's mate in the Navy. He had a year of pharmacy training in the United States prior to going in the military. He knew every medication, its dosage, and what it was used for. He wasn't surgically oriented like I was. He was medically oriented. Baker was an aviation bosun's mate. He was handy with tools and equipment and could repair and so forth. Baker was from Berlin, NH, and spoke French like a Canadian. And that was the language of Laos so he wanted Baker badly.

I had taken a year of French at Oregon State so I had that background and that was a benefit as far as Dooley was concerned. And he also wanted my surgical background.

So then you went off to Laos.

We actually flew from Los Angeles to Hawaii and spent several days there getting acclimated. Then we flew from there to the Philippines and then to Saigon. Down in Saigon we spent a month as stevedores unloading ships and reloading the cargoes onto DC-3s. These were our medical supplies. The Willys Jeep Corporation gave Dooley a brand new blue jeep which he named Agnes after his mother. It was our only transportation. We kept loading up these planes in Saigon and they kept flying all our supplies up to Vientiane. The medications we got were mostly from Mead Corporation. It was mostly outdated medicine.

These were all donated, as I understand.

All donated and all outdated.

Dooley was able, with his gift of gab, was able to get Mead to donate this stuff.

Yes--20,000 pounds worth. And Dooley was criticized for dispensing outdated medication. And he said, "An outdated aspirin is better than no aspirin at all." That was his standard line. And he was right. Outdated aspirin is 95 percent effective. It was actually much more effective on these people because they never had the antibiotics and their bacteria had no resistance to antibiotics. So it was a whole different ball game.

How do you recall that experience in Laos?

After we transferred all our supplies up there, we then flew into Vientiane and we were met at the airport by a woman doctor--an American woman--Dr. Campbell. She had kind of

bluish-purple hair. We were in her open jeep and she was going to take us down to the embassy compound. She said, "You sons of bitches. Keep your heads down. There going to get blown off. There's communists all over this place." And she was right. So we all ducked down. Later we asked why they didn't shoot her. And she said, "They're afraid of a woman with purple hair."

I have to tell you something interesting. I came to Santa Maria in 1967. Now we're talking 11 years later. And who's the fifth doctor I shake hands with? Dr. Campbell. Marion Campbell was practicing in Santa Maria when I came here. Her husband at the time was a Dutchman who was a hospital administrator and he was working in Saigon shacked up with a nurse. Dr. Campbell had been assigned to the American Embassy in Vientiane as the embassy doctor. She was shacking up with the head of the CIA unit there. That relationship kind of drifted apart and she started shacking with the chargé d'affaires. His name was Carter DePaul. She eventually got a divorce from the Dutch husband and married Carter DePaul. Carter was always dabbling in investments and he'd make a little money here, lose a little money there. He was very well read, very erudite, very cosmopolitan, very sophisticated. He was pretty good with languages. When she came here, her name was still Marion Campbell and she and Carter lived about 15 blocks from where I am right now.

Is she still around?

No. She died. She was cleaning out the gutters on her office, was on a ladder, and fell and broke a hip. And she never did well after that. Carter had died about 5 years before that.

How long did you stay in Laos with Dooley?

We were 1 month in Saigon and 5 months in Laos. We started out in Vientiane to get acclimated and for political purposes. We had our own little place in the embassy compound. The nice thing is that we had milk. That's something not very common in that part of the country.

You set up a clinic there.

Not really a clinic in Vientiane. When we left there, we traveled to Vang Vieng and that was quite a ways north. Where the jeep would get mired down in mud, we'd have to cut down trees and jack the thing up and put them under the wheels. It was primitive. Anyway, that's where we established our clinic and got to know the people pretty well. It was the third or fourth largest city in the region and had a population of about 2,000. The people all lived in the boonies. I would get called out to deliver babies that weren't coming along naturally. All the children were delivered by midwives and every once in a while the midwife would get into trouble and they'd call us and go over and help. We'd also go to sew up people who had been injured. There were a number of bear attacks. We also treated people with atabrine or chloroquine for malaria. We'd also take care of people who were dying, sometimes in their last stages--end-stage renal disease, end-stage liver disease. We saw a lot of tuberculosis. The tubercular people all smoked a heroin derivative as a cough-suppressant so they were all heroin addicts. If they didn't smoke it, they'd just cough out their lungs.

They do some things we in the western world have either forgotten or never known. When they deliver a baby, the woman sits in this house, often her own house, and she has a rope suspended from the ceiling, maybe an inch in diameter with a big knot. She'd sit on a short-legged stool. Sometimes she'd be on her knees. But whenever she'd have a contraction, she'd

pull on the rope and pull herself up a little bit, and it would help counteract the pain of the contraction. When the baby was delivered, the mother is above. The baby is coming straight down toward the floor. Now here's the baby on the floor. The mother's above the baby. The placenta is above the baby so the baby's getting this tremendous blood supply that it needs. And the placenta has a gravity factor helping it come down. If you look at the mechanics, that's the right way to have a baby. Gravity is doing everything. Then they find the oldest man there--the grandfather--and he starts smoking a pipe and blows smoke in the baby's ears to impart wisdom. These people are animists; they believe there are spirits in the rocks, the trees, and the flowers.

You'd come back from delivering a baby and you're shoes would be filled with blood. You'd have 10 or 15 leeches on your lower legs sucking out the blood.

All these years later, after having been through that experience, and you've been a physician, an ophthalmologist, and you've had your practice, do you ever think about those days back in Indochina?

No, not really. I still get involved in foreign language and I meet people now and then from Laos. There's a Dr. Michael Worth who's at George Washington. Dr. Worth's wife is from Laos. I think she was born, or at least raised there. She works for one of the big museums in Washington, DC. If you ever want to know about Laos, she's a beautiful lady and lovely person. Whenever I would come back there for a board of directors meeting . . . I was on the Board of Directors at GW . . . , I'd visit with her and it was like old home week. We'd sit there and talk in the Lao language. In answer to your question, once in a while if I run into a person from Laos or Thailand, then I start thinking about those days.

Did you ever have any dealings with Dooley after that?

Only two things. One was when I had him to my medical school as a speaker at the end of 1959 and then a few months later I got together with him when they had an episode of "This is Your Life," the Ralph Edwards program. And that was the end of my relationship with Dr. Dooley.

And then when he had his premature death from cancer.

I've got to tell you. There's a town about halfway between Santa Maria and Santa Barbara called Solvang.

It's a so-called Danish village.

That's exactly right. The doctor from Solvang, a guy named Bill Van Valen, a general surgeon. He liked to travel a lot and liked to visit people. He'd pick out some place or some person and go visit him. He read about Dooley and that they were both doctors. So he goes and visits Dooley. While he was visiting him, Dooley says, "I've got this thing on my chest. I was riding a bicycle in the jungle a while back and I hit a tree root and it jammed the handlebar into my chest under the breast. I've got this lump. Why don't you take a look at it."

Van Valen looked at it and said it could be benign or something bad. "Let me remove it and send it in to a path lab," which he did. So he removed this dark mass about the size of a walnut from Dooley's anterior chest wall and sent it to a path lab at Ching Mai Medical School. The school was under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania, so these were pretty sharp people. They processed the specimen and found it to be malignant melanoma. I guess Dooley then said, "Whatever the results are, I don't want anybody else to know," or something like that.

Dooley knew that this was a death warrant. But eventually, somebody else found out and they notified MEDICO. MEDICO then became extremely concerned because he was the person who was the ultimate fund-raiser for the organization. On a pretext, they said they were in all kinds of trouble, financial this and political that, and we need you back here immediately. And that was a pretext to bring him back. As soon as he arrived in New York they shipped him over to Sloan-Kettering and they evaluated him and determined that he had metastatic disease and proscribed a treatment regimen for him. And Dooley was getting worse. But he went on a lecture tour. And then he started to fail. He had it in the bone and in the spine. He had a lymph node dissection under the right arm to the point where he couldn't raise his arm anymore. So he had to hold his right wrist with his left hand so he could hold his hand up so he could shake hands with people. Then his spine started collapsing and then he died at age 34.

A tragic loss for a very promising doctor.

He's been likened to Albert Schweitzer in many ways. I think Dooley's phrase was "I'm going to give care to people who ain't got it."

You certainly had some experiences.

Yes. And I survived them.